DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 369 606 RC 019 576

AUTHOR Whorton, James E.; And Others
TITLE A Comparison of Leisure and Recreational Activities for Adults with and without Mental Retardation.
PUB DATE Mar 94
NOTE 9p.; In: Montgomery, Diane, Ed. Rural Partnerships: Working Together. Proceedings of the Annual National Conference of the American Council on Rural Special Education (ACRES) (14th, Austin, Texas, March 23-26, 1994); see RC 019 557.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Programs; Cognitive Ability; College Students; *Developmental Disabilities; Individual Needs; *Leisure Education; *Mental Retardation; *Normalization (Disabilities); *Recreational Activities; *Recreational Programs

ABSTRACT

This paper compares the preferences for leisure and recreational activities of adults with and without mental retardation. In a previous study conducted by Butler (1988), 548 adults with developmental disabilities and mental retardation were interviewed with open-ended questions about living arrangement needs, competitive employment and work training needs, and leisure needs. The current study used the same questions for interviewing 300 college and university undergraduate and graduate students, many of whom were majoring in special education and regular education. A comparison revealed the two groups had similar preferences for leisure or recreational activities. About two-thirds of the activities chosen by the mentally retarded population were not directly related to cognitive ability, indicating that this ability does not specifically determine the extent in which one may participate or enjoy leisure activities. Educators should offer an array of normalized activities for disabled students to choose from, rather than relying on stereotypical segregated or passive activities. Additionally, disabled individuals should involve themselves, as much as possible, in the same type of events as their same-age peers. Equally important are appropriate learning environments, the encouragement of adaptation and proficiency through systematic skill instruction, and collaboration between home, school, and community for successful recreational programming for disabled adults. (LP)

James E. Whorton, University of Southern Mississippi
Robert L. Morgan, Chadron State College
Seal Nisbet, University of Southern Mississippi

A COMPARISON OF LEISURE AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR ADULTS WITH AND WITHOUT MENTAL RETARDATION

The importance of recreation and leisure activities for persons with handicapping conditions has been well documented in the literature, as have the issues facing this area of need (Dattilo & Rusch, 1985; Falvey, 1989; Patton, Beirne-Smith, & Payne, 1990; Schleien & Larson, 1986; Schloss, Smith, & Keihl, 1986). Recent research has demonstrated that persons with handicaps can successfully indulge in recreation and leisure skills (Falvey, 1989; Schloss et al., 1986).

Although documentation of benefits exist, several barriers have been noted to inhibit successful promotion of skill development and programming (Dattilo et al., 1985; Patton et al., 1990; Schloss et al., 1986; Schleien et al, 1986). For example, one barrier identified by Schleien & Larson (1986), was that the majority of programs for recreation are still essentially segregated. The segregation may be due to such things as limited information regarding availability of opportunities, limited social skills, and programs in isolated settings (Schloss et al., 1986). Another example contributing to the restriction of activities is that many individuals do not have specific skills necessary due to a lack of sufficient instruction or experience (Patton et al., 1990). Because development of play and leisure skills does not occur spontaneously in individuals with mental retardation, specific programming is needed to facilitate involvement (Fine, Welch-Burke, & Fondario, 1985).

Factors preventing optimal training for leisure and recreation could leave individuals with little opportunity for choice, which in turn may enhance feelings of failure and of learned helplessness (Dattilo et al., 1985). Individuals with mental retardation need the opportunity to exhibit self-initiation and self-determined behavior (Dattilo et al., 1985; Nietupski et al., 1986). Such abilities allow an individual to take responsibility for their own choices and actions (Gardner, 1992). The importance of this is evidenced in efforts such as The Self-Determination Curriculum Project, in which development of such competencies is emphasized in teaching youth with disabilities (Gardner, 1992). Though choice is of critical importance in leisure and recreation programming, the element of choice-making has received relatively little attention in the education of the handicapped (Guess et al., 1985).

In reaction and recognition to the need for recreation and leisure opportunities and programming a number of published papers and curricula have been reported and developed in order to identify essential elements associated with recreation and

leisure for individuals with handicaps (Falvey, 1989). The critical characteristics identified most often included (1) a need for activities that are chronological age appropriate (Falvey, 1989; Schleien et al., 1986; Schloss et al., 1986), (2) interaction with nonhandicapped peers (Wacker et al., 1984), (3) integration in the community or natural setting (Falvey, 1989; Schleien et al., 1986; Schloss et al., 1986), and (4) opportunities for self initiation and choice (Dattilo et al., 1985; Falvey, 1989; Guess et al., 1985; Nietupski et al, 1986). In order to enhance optimal leisure functioning in individuals with mental retardation, direct inclusion of skill development should be in their education and habilitation plans (Fine et al., 1985). The present authors agree.

Individuals with disabilities can only function independently when given access the opportunity. Communities are beginning to recognize the importance of recreation and leisure opportunities for persons with mental retardation by enabling them to choose and participate, therefore acquiring a sense of enrichment and accomplishment (Patton et al., 1990). Participation in leisure activities should be considered a critical dimension in the life and personal fulfillment of an individual with mental retardation (Fine et al., 1985).

Hoover, Wheeler, and Reetz (1992) reported the development of a leisure satisfaction scale designed for adolescents and adults with mental retardation. Regarding individuals with mental retardation, they noted "The lack of information generated from consumers is unfortunate given the personal choice components central to the experience of a quality leisure life" (Hoover, Wheeler, and Reitz, 1992, 154). As noted previously, opportunities for self initiation and choice should receive more attention.

A recent paper by Hayden, Lakin, Hill, Bruininks, and Copher (1992) addressed the social relationships and leisure activities of 336 adults with mental retardtion. The study addressed different types of living arrangements, friendships, neighborhood integration, family involvement, daily activities, and support for integration from care providers. One of the important findings focused on the need for additional attention relative to the daily activities of adults with mental retardation living in the community.

This manuscript focuses on leisure or recreational activities that people participate in or select when given a choice. It was conceptualized following a study by Butler (1988) in which the preferences of leisure and recreational activities for a group of adults with mental retardation were identified. This current study, following a similar design, was conducted to generate a representative list of leisure or recreational activities from a group of adults without mental retardation, and to compare and contrast the two sets of data.

As previously noted, this study follows one conducted by Butler (1988) in which 548 adults with developmentally disabilities/mentally retardation living in 30 Mississippi counties, the vast majority of whom lived in supported living arrangements rather than at home, were surveyed. Specific demographic data were not recorded by the interviewers; they simply reported more males than females, while the racial composition included both white and African American individuals. Specific psychometric data were also unavailable, but most of the subjects interviewed were at least moderately retarded; many, if not most, had lived previously in residential institutional settings. Approximately 60 service providers conducted informal open ended interviews using a survey (needs assessment) in regard to living arrangement needs, competitive employment/work training needs, leisure needs, and miscellaneous needs. The element regarding leisure time needs referred to activities the individual did or would choose to do for fun, entertainment, and/or recreation in their free time. Specific questions included: "What are the things you do for fun (recreation) when you are not working?", "What are the fun things you would do if you could?", and "How do you spend your free time (nights, weekends) away from work?". The questions were presented in individual interviews, and questions were restated and reworded if necessary in order to obtain the most candid and accurate information regarding future wants and needs.

The current study used the same questions but for a different population, consisting of nearly 300 college and university undergraduate and graduate students; many of the students were majoring in special education and studying mental retardation, while others were regular education majors. Again, specific demographics were not recorded, but there were more females than males. The data were obtained by group rather than individual basis, with subjects listing their preferences on paper. The subjects had no knowledge of the purpose of the survey other than for reasons of inquiry.

Results revealed various responses of preferred leisure or recreational activities chosen by the subjects from both groups. Table 1 lists those items that were either most frequently mentioned, or characteristic of the responses given by each group.

The authors', with only a few exceptions, perceive the two lists as remarkably similar. As illustrated in the list generated by the population with mental retardation, sixty to seventy percent of the activities are not necessarily a direct function of cognitive ability, indicating such ability is not specifically a determinant in the extent to which one may participate or enjoy their leisure time.

As noted earlier, persons with handicaps can successfully participate in leisure and recreational activities (Falvey,

1989; Schloss et al., 1986). The results of this investigation do indeed indicate that individuals with mental retardation have essentially the same interests and desires relative to recreation and leisure time. Specific skill development or enhancement may be needed in programming efforts in order to compensate for possible gaps in experiences or instruction (Patton et al., 1990; Fine et al., 1985).

Although specific instructional strategies for including recreation and leisure into the curricula are relatively recent in development, educators have a respectable base of literature from which to pull approaches. In reviewing the literature, certair issues appeared throughout the research base.

First, what skills specificlly should be taught to young adults with mental retardation? The basis for content should focus upon the preference or choice made by the individual with mental retardation (Jeffree & Cheseldine, 1984; Schleien et al., 1994; Wehman & Schleien, 1980; Reynolds, 1981). Individuals participate in leisure activities because they enjoy them, but the selection must be an informed one (Jeffree & Cheseldine, 1984). Though the students can communicate their desires, they must be made aware of options. Individuals with mental retardation may not be aware of their options, or even of their broad selection of free time activities from which to choose. Educators should consider an array of normalized activities for their students, rather than the stereotypical segregated or passive activities.

Another factor determining selection of recreational activities for individuals with mental retardation is the age-appropriateness of the choice (Wehman et al., 1985; Schloss et al., 1986; Schleien et al., 19994). Choices made by individuals with mental retardation may not be consisitent with their chronological age, so it is important for educators to make individuals aware of appropriate activities, as well as making these activities both feasible (through necessary adaptations) and accessible. Individuals with mental retardation should involve themselves, to as much an extent as possible, in events their same age peers would. In assessing the desires of individuals with mental retardation, it was found that activities perceived as important were those selected by nondisabled peers.

In addition to choice and age-appropriateness, the learning environment is an important element in successfull recreational programming. The setting for instruction should occur across all environments, with particular emphasis on home and community (Nieetupski et al., 1984). Preparation for all environments should begin early in an individual's education, this enables participation to be the fullest extent possible (Schleien et al., 1993). Wehman et al., (1985) believe that instruction must occur outside of the classroom if parents are to perceive training as credible. It cannot be assumed that skills taught

in the school setting will transfer to other environments, therefore, the natural settings in which the individual would ideally spend time in pursuit of leisure is the setting in which training should occur.

Once appropriate environments are identified, assesement of the setting and materials is necessary Wehman et al., 1985; Schleien et al, 1994). Necessary adjustments or adaptations in the setting can alleviate the potential for future problems or difficulties, while making instruction enjoyable and free of undue frustration (Wehman et al, 1985).

When selection of skills and appropriate settings is complete, the process of training the identified leisure activity is needed. Student's deficits in their desired activity are identified and those areas are addressed (Fine et al., 1985). These skills are then systematically taught to the individual with adaptation as proficiency occurs (Wehman et al., 1985), and reduction in assistance as acquisition and maintenance increase (Schloss et al., 1986). As training continues, research shows that active involovement of the individual increases as passive participation decreases (Jeffree & Cheseldine, 1984).

A final element involvement of key resource people. Collaboration is a foundation to successful programming and transition for young adults with mental retardation. The working relationship between home, school, and community should be a primary goal of an educator striving for successful recreational programming (Fine et al., 1985). Networking among professionals is necessary tp promote quality services for individuals with disabilities (Schleien et al., 1990; Wehman et al., 1985). Involvement of concerned individuals could supplement and enhance the recreational programming of an individual with mental retardation.

Barriers are currently present in our delivery systems and in our public schools. An acknowledgement of these barriers and informed approach to overcoming them is the first step to realizing successful recreational curricula in our schools, homes, and communities.

The concepts of choice, age-appropriateness, systematic skill instruction, and collaboration are building blocks to the developmetn of a recreation repertoire in the lives of individuals with mental retardation. When empowered with the ability to participate, lives are enriched. These efforts allow individuals to be active and successful members of the community.

References

Butler, E. (1988, November). Mississippi Community Services Directors: Needs Assessment Survey. Paper presented at meeting of the Mississippi chapter of the American Associaction on Mental Retardation, Tupelo, MS.

Dattilo, J., & Rusch, F. R. (1985). Effects of choice on leisure participation for persons with severe handicaps. Journal of The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 10(4), 194-199.

Falvey, M. A. (1989). Community-based curriculum: Instructional strategies for students with severe handicaps (2nd ed.). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Fine, A. H., Welch-Burke C. S., & Fondario, L. J. (1985). A developmental model for the integration of leisure programming in the education of individuals with mental retardation. Mental Retardation, 23(6), 289-296.

Gardner, J. (1992, January-February). Education and training. The ARC Today, p. 7.

Guess, D., Benson, H. A., & Seigel-Causey, E. (1985). Concepts and issues related to choice-making and autonomy among persons with severe disabilities. Journal of The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 10(2), 79-86.

Hayden, M.F., Lakin, K. C., Hill, B. K., Bruininks, R. H., & Copher, J. I. (1992). Social and leisure integration of people with mental retardation in foster hiomes and small group homes. Education and Training in Mental Retardation, 27(3), 187-199.

Hoover, J. H., Wheeler, J. J., & Reetz, L. J. (1992). Development of a leisure satisfaction scale for use with adolescents and adults with mental retardation: Initial findings. Education and Training in Mental Retardation, 27(2), 153-160.

Jeffree, D.M., & Cheseldine, S. (1984). Let's Join In. London: Souvenir Press.

Nietupski, J., Hamre-Nietupski, S., Green, K., Varnum-Teeter, K., Twedt, B., LePera, D., Scebold, K., & Hanrahan, M. (1986). Self-initiated and sustained leisure activity participation by students with moderate/severe handicaps. Education and Training of the Mentally Retarded, 21(4), 259-264.

Patton, J. R., Beirne-Smith, M., & Payne, J. S. (1990). Mental Retardation (3rd ed.). New York: Macmillan.

Schleien, S. J., & Larson, A. (1986). Adult leisure education for the independent use of a community recreation center. Journal of The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 11(1), 39-44.

Schleien, S.J., Rynders, J.E., & Green, F.P. (1994). Facilitating integration in recreation environments. In Hayden, M.F., & Abery, B.H. (Eds.) Challenges for a Service System in Transition: Ensuring Quality Community Experiences for Persons with Developmental Disabilities. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Schloss, P. J., Smith, M. A., & Kiehl, W. (1986). Rec club: A community centered approach to recreational development for adults with mild to moderate retardation. Education and Training of the Mentally Retarded, 21(4), 282-288.

Wacker, D. P., Berg, W. K., & Moore, S. J. (1984). Increasing on task performance of students with severe handicaps on cooperative games. Education and Training of the Mentally Retarded, 19(3), 183-190.

Wehman, P., & Schleien, S.J. (1980). Classroom techniques. Education and Training of the Mentally Retarded. 15(1), 50-57.

TABLE 1

Selected Leisure and Recreational Activities

NON-RETARDED	RETARDED
Go antique shopping	Have a truck and a bass boat
Attend plays	Drive a ski boat
Go to sports events	Go to the movies more
Go to bars	Go on a real vacation
Browse bookstores	Build a doghouse for my dog
Ride in boats	See a pro basketball game
Build things	Ride in an 18 wheeler
Do yardwork	Take care of animals
Go camping	Learn to play a piano
Go to church	Meet new people
Cook	Learn to swim
Go for drives	Get a dog
Go out to eat	Fly in a plane
Fish	Water ski
Spend time with family	Learn to ride a bike
Gardening	Do aerobic exercises
Play golf	Visit with my mom
Hike	Buy a VCR
Listen to music	Go on a picnic
Go mountain climbing	Whittle
Make love	Travel to Europe
Go to the movies	Date young lady I met at mall
Paint	Go deep sea fishing
Ride horses	Go to a country music show
Read a book	Spend more time with boyfriend
Ride a bike	Go to a boxing match
Sail	I would like to have sex
Sit on the porch	Shop for my own clothes
Sleep	Learr to play soccer
Spend time with spouse	Go out to clubs
Watch television	Go to Bourbon Street
Travel	Play volleyball
Play tennis	Learn to cook
Visit with friends	Learn to play tennis
Walk	Go deer hunting
Watch sunsets	Play more sports
Write	Hike
Play with children	Play cards
Rent movies	Do woodwork
Play cards	Get married